

GENETICIST SUES VATICAN'S PAPER

Italian Says He Was Libeled
for Warning of Baby Boom

By PAUL HOFMANN
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ROME, Jan. 20—A prominent geneticist warned recently against a "baby boom" in Italy as a consequence of auto-less Sundays, and the Vatican reacted with such vehemence that he has brought a libel suit against its newspaper, L'Osservatore Romano.

There is no recent precedent for such a judicial action. The 113-year-old daily, which does not have a reputation for easy reading, has probably never had to defend itself in court.

It may not have to do so now either, because it is technically a non-Italian publication, written and printed in the sovereign state of Vatican City.

The plaintiff, Prof. Adriano Buzzati Traverso, contends, however, that the newspaper—with a circulation of about 100,000 copies—is read by tens of thousands of Italians and is available at all newsstands in Rome and in other cities throughout Italy.

Now Italian courts are pondering whether they can consider Professor Buzzati Traverso's suit. If they decide that the paper can be sued, the defendants will be the managing editor, Raimondo Manzini, and the Rev. Gino Concetti, the author of the article that the scientist found libelous.

Mr. Manzini, a 73-year-old former member of the Italian Parliament, was appointed by Pope John XXIII as chief of L'Osservatore Romano and was made a Vatican citizen. Father Concetti is a Franciscan theologian who teaches in a Roman high school and frequently contributes articles to the paper.

The Franciscan's ire was aroused by Professor Buzzati Traverso's advocacy last month of birth control in Italy in an article on the front page of Corriere della Sera of Milan, the nation's largest newspaper.

The Milan geneticist, who is 60 years old, expressed concern that the energy crisis, with its restrictions on private driving and its other austerity measures, might spur Italians to indulge in "more frequent and prolonged love play," and that the result might be a rise in the nation's birthrate later this year.

Italy has more than 900,000 births annually in a population of over 55 million. The scientist said that the country was already over-populated and that the number of births should be reduced by 400,000 a year.

Professor Buzzati Traverso urged the Government to legalize abortion and to spread information about birth control through the media and the school system.

The geneticist's views and recommendations were vehemently contested by Father Concetti in L'Osservatore Romano. To permit abortion, the Franciscan wrote, "would mean pushing mankind back by thousands of years and substituting the laws of the feud, the jungle and the crematory furnaces for the conquests of conscience and civilization."

Professor Buzzati Traverso was stung especially by the reference to crematories, which he interpreted as alluding to Nazi death camps.

"To make reactionary comments is quite normal for L'Osservatore Romano," the scientist said in an interview. "But to defame people as Nazis is too much."